CONSIDERATIONS

ON THE

PROPOSED APPLICATION

TO

His MAJESTY and to PARLIAMENT,

FOR THE

ESTABLISHMENT

OF A

LICENSED THEATRE

IN

EDINBURGH.

1507/760

We may venture to aſk, Whether Knowledge, whether Induſtry, and whether Virtue have *not* declined in this City, ſince the Play-houſe was firſt opened here?

Dr ——'s Morality of Stage-plays, *tranſpoſed.*

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BRITISH MUSEUM
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JAN

Edinburgh, 12th February 1767.

THE THEATRE has been the chief topic of conversation here for ſome time paſt, and is likely to continue ſo. The diſputes between Actors, Audience and Managers, engaged our attention ſo long; and the conſequences of theſe differences will employ our thoughts yet longer.

As to the grounds of quarrel betwixt *Stayley* and *Beatt*, *Baker* and *Ward*, I know little, and will ſay leſs. Such private contentions are below public notice; though the talk of the town has been of late ſufficiently engroſſed by them. Beſides, 'twere improper to give any opinion on matters that, I believe, are either ſecretly huſhed, or judicially to be determined.

As to the juſtice of the diſpleaſure of the Audience on *Saturday* evening the 24th *ult.* againſt Mr *Aicken*, who declined aſking pardon for a real, or a ſuppoſed affront, neither will I take upon me to decide. This performer is certainly ſenſible now, that he had better complied with the company's requeſt; as he muſt be convinced their pardon could have been more eaſily aſked, than their rage appeaſed, or the conſequent loſs repaired.

In fine, as to the conduct of this Audience, upon a refuſal, in demoliſhing the houſe; or as to the competency of trial for ſuch an offence, I mean not to enlarge. With regard to the firſt, I would only obſerve, That as the proceeding was undoubtedly riotous and illegal, the common defence of its being the only, and the uſual means of redreſs, does not fully juſtify the deed. To the general charge of a lawleſs attack upon, and injury to another's property, there is added an aggravation ariſing from the rank and profeſſion of the perſons who committed it. Theſe, I am informed, were moſtly medical, or other ſtudents, and the clerks or apprentices of Gentlemen in commercial life.—Now, that the former ſhould be concerned in an affair of

this ſort, is indeed ſurprizing, not only as it was degrading their character, but was falſifying their oath, which all of them had taken only a few days before, by ſubſcription, in the *Almum* of the Univerſity; where it is enjoined and ſworn to, among other articles, that the *Cives* ſhall not aid, ſtir up, or promote any tumult, riot, or diſorderly meeting; *nec ultius diſſidii, aut tumultus, clam palamve vel auctores, vel participes futuros.*—To an obligation of the ſame nature the other great part of this Audience were alſo enjoined, by a cuſtomary article of indenture with their maſters, under whoſe ſervice moſt of them were.——In reſpect to the competency of legal redreſs, I ſhould think, whatever may be practice or law, it is juſtice that the Proprietors be ſatisfied for that injury done to their property, againſt which it is the glorious aim of Britiſh liberty to provide. Although the place, it is true, was in law unknown, yet the timber and benches, I imagine, the ſcenes, boxes, and glaſſes, were as really the property of thoſe gentlemen who purchaſed and paid for them, as the furniture in their houſes, or the crop upon their lands; and if on this point an action is brought, it muſt ſurely be found competent, and will unqueſtionably be heard, provided the influence of another ſide is not too powerful to prevent it.—In the caſe of *Patent-houſes*, inſtances of ſuch proſecutions are by no means rare: Heavy fines, and long impriſonment, have been ſentences pronounced, on like occaſions, by a judge.

But none of theſe things give occaſion to this letter. It has for its ſubject an affair more alarming and important, more ſerious and intereſting than all of them; namely, The propoſed application to his Majeſty and to Parliament for *the eſtabliſhment of a* LICENSED THEATRE *in this place.*

That a petition for this purpoſe, in conſequence of our late diſturbance, is actually preparing, I am credibly informed; that all endeavours are uſed to gain it an intereſt that will enſure ſucceſs; that a motion to this end was made in Council, with a propoſal to add it as a clauſe in the bill for Extenſion of the Royalty; that a great Faculty have eſpouſed the meaſure, and will forward the plan; that the County Member undertakes its management, and brings it into the Houſe;

Houſe; and that many of the maſters, with the head of our Univerſity, and *ſome* reverend Miniſters, have joined iſſue to promote the ſcheme,—has been reported as a truth.

The conſequence of ſuch a privilege, and the effects it muſt produce, ſhould the deſign be carried through, have preſented themſelves to me in ſo ſtriking a manner, that I am unable to reſiſt the diſpoſition I feel of communicating on this Propoſal my ſentiments to the public. And I am induced to do it thus early, as I would rather beforehand prevent, than afterwards exclaim, and that of ſuch conſequences gentlemen may be aware, ere they embark in a cauſe, which, howe'er coloured o'er by the artifice or gloſs of partizans and of friends, yet, on ſerious reflection, they may ſee grounds to condemn. If the following Conſiderations, then, ſhould be in any way uſeful even to *one*, for this end, the Writer has obtained his aim, and will not think his labour loſt.

Without entering farther than is neceſſary into the general queſtion concerning the *lawfulneſs* and expediency of ſtage-plays at all, for which the author has neither leiſure nor inclination, it is only propoſed to offer ſome arguments againſt, and conſider a little the effects of, a Licenſed Theatre in *this* city; from which he ſhall be helped to refute the principal reaſons aſſigned for the encouragement of the meaſure intended.

It is not improper, however, to remark, in ſetting out, That the *uſefulneſs* of Dramatic Repreſentations is a point far from being ſo clear as many would have it imagined. Whether viewed in the light of an *amuſement*, or regarded as a mean of *inſtruction*, (the two great points in which they are held up for approbation), it would be no difficult taſk to make their impropriety pretty evidently appear. That they are an improper *entertainment*, might be ſhewn from their unfitneſs to anſwer the ends of entertainment, or of relaxation, in as much as they demand an attention which defeats their deſign, and, in many caſes, engages the mind more than real buſineſs,—from their conſumpt of time, and great expence,—from their intereſting too deeply the paſſions,—and from their inconſiſtency with the principles of Chriſtianity, which, although allowing relaxation to the

mind, require that relaxation ſhould be ſomething innocent in itſelf. That they are equally improper as means of *inſtruction*, could be argued—from their being unauthoriſed, nay, prohibited in Scripture,—from the leſſons they teach, —from the diſciples they train,—and from the effects they produce: All of which reaſoning experience would ſupport, and bring in a proof that muſt reach conviction to every heart. But thoſe that incline to ſee the ſubject profeſſedly treated of, on *moral* and *religious* principles, with great accuracy, and at large, we refer to the Reverend Dr *Witherſpoon*'s maſterly pamphlet on the *Nature and Effects of the Stage*; or to Mr *Rouſſeau*'s celebrated eſſay on the *political* influence of public ſpectacles in *Geneva*; where they will find much good ſenſe, and ſolid argument.

Leaving our readers, then, to the conviction they muſt receive on the *general topic* from the foregoing hints, from their own obſervation, and, above all, from the feelings of their heart in the hours of recollection, We go on to lay before them the *particular* impropriety of a Licenſed Theatre in *Edinburgh*, and the fatal tendency of ſuch an eſtabliſhment to this city, in its *religious*, in its *literary*, and in its *commercial* intereſts.

I. That in proportion to the advantages we enjoy, are our obligations to the love and practice of virtue ſtrengthened and enforced, is a ſelf-evident truth few will dare to deny. That of them to whom much is given much will be required, is the declaration of Holy writ. But that attending and encouraging theatrical repreſentations, whether in a houſe that is licenſed or not, is altogether oppoſite to the character of Chriſtians, and genius of the Goſpel, needs not many words to demonſtrate. Whether we think of the company among whom Chriſtians then aſſociate,—the gay and the giddy, the thoughtleſs and the profane—whoſe life is diſſipation, and whoſe taſte is corruption; or of the perſons to whoſe luxury they thereby contribute a ſupport, —the outcaſts of civil ſociety,—denied acceſs within the pale of our church,—and denominated by the Great Legiſlature, vagabonds and rogues,—perſons who, beſides that inbred depravity which firſt prompts to ſuch a purſuit, muſt

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enter into all the refinements of iniquity ere they can do juſtice to many of the characters they are called to repreſent,—who (after a few are excepted) exhibit in their lives a picture of vice more ſhocking, perhaps, than the fabulous pencil of the drama has ever yet drawn: Or, whether we attend to the ſights that on ſuch occaſions ſtrike the eye, or words that reach the ear,—ſcenes of folly, murder, or revenge;—the indecent language of love, or of luſt,—the profane jeſt, raſh oath, and irreligious turn,—things ſacred abuſed,—things ugly made fair;—when we lead our thoughts, I ſay, to conſiderations ſuch as theſe, can we conceive company or employments more unfit for the diſciples of Him who died for their ſins on a croſs? And is ſuch a return to the Giver of all good, becoming creatures endued with reaſon and underſtanding, in privileges favoured beyond moſt nations, and bleſſed with the cleareſt diſcovery of the glorious goſpel of peace? How are the profeſſors of the preſent age ſhamed by the untutored moraliſts of old? How melancholy the reflection, That in reſpect of ſtrictneſs in principle, and decorum of manners, they ſhould be condemned,—not by the writings of the Apoſtles, or fathers of our church alone,—but by the page of Heathen authors uninſpired, whoſe only guide was Nature's glimmering light? From whoſe works, were it proper, might be excerpted the ſoundeſt arguments and moſt earneſt diſſuaſives againſt the Stage: And in theſe, not only the rigid Philoſopher, but even the Poet, leſs ſevere, has joined,

But zeal, I feel, has led me away. I meant to ſhew the alarming influence of the Theatre on the *morals* of a people. I have done this, in ſo far as I proved the tendency of the Stage to leſſen or deſtroy the principles of the goſpel; and certainly whatever has this effect, cannot be very favourable to the intereſts of religion. An attendance on the Theatre, however, is not merely *ſubverſive* of *good* ſentiments;—it goes farther to poſitive *ill*. It promotes ſo much a ſpirit of pleaſure, and idleneſs, and diſſipation, that it ſoon baniſhes all ſober thinking. By degrees, it not only eradicates the principles of virtue, but after the road has been inſenſibly paved, ſows the ſeeds, and finally forwards the growth

growth of corruption. To point out, with preciſion, however, the various means, by which either immediately, or by conſequence, it reaches theſe ends, would open a field of inquiry, in ſome parts indelicate, in all diſagreeable. Let it ſuffice, therefore, on *this* head, merely to refer to the *fact*, by appeal to experience. And I would aſk every man of ſenſibility and truth, what were his feelings, as to religion, at the end of a play? Did he then, in ſober reflexion, look back with ſatisfaction on the paſt hours' entertainment? Was his heart more diſpoſed to the practice of duty, more ready to join in acts of devotion, or better prepared to leave this world? Does he find this employment of an evening on *Saturday*, peculiarly fit him for bearing his part in acts of public worſhip on the morrow, or entering with alacrity his ſecret retirement at night? Nay, after an attendance of years, let him tell me, has his virtue been ſtrengthened, has his mind been improved? The reverſe, alas! is the truth. And indeed it muſt. Not that I refuſe all *power* in Theatrical Repreſentations to produce ſome of theſe effects: but, I affirm, that experience ſhews fully how inefficacious they are *in fact* for it; becauſe it is not with this intention they are frequented; nay, to the generality of attenders their reliſh would be loſt, were this their effect. Pleaſure, pleaſure, is the ſole motive of reſort: and ſuch the deſign, I know not, in truth, any one thing more unfavourable to the cauſe of religion than the Stage. It is from experience I ſpeak it, both from my own experience, and that of others. Though a young man, and almoſt a ſtranger in the world, I could name, in my ſmall ſphere of obſervation, not *one*, but *ſeveral* inſtances of youth of this City, who, notwithſtanding the advantages of good education, and pious example, are now become from averſeneſs and diſſipation to all that is ſober and ſerious, almoſt a burden to themſelves, and altogether uſeleſs in ſociety. To nothing elſe than their intoxication with, and attendance upon Theatrical Repreſentations, and the conſequence of theſe, can their ruin, (if grace prevent not) both here and hereafter, be originally aſcribed, as the ſource of all that guilt and miſery which has ſince flowed in upon them.

them. From perſonal experience I ſubjoin, that one Play will *unpreach* a dozen Sermons.

It ſignifies nothing here to object, that this is the *abuſe*, not the *uſe* of the Stage; and that to argue from the one againſt the other, is unfair: for believe it, the former is ſo *inſeparably* connected, ſo cloſely interwoven with the latter, that the line of diſtinction can hardly be marked; and I am much of opinion, the laſt is but the opening to the firſt: if we leave ſpeculation, at leaſt, and keep by fact, it will be found ſo.

This being the caſe then, it ſurely concerns every good man to exert his endeavours to prevent, in This place, an eſtabliſhment ſo fatal to religion and virtue. From motives of *patriotiſm* too, as well as of ſuperior obligation, I would call on our Citizens to aid the attempt; for religion's importance to the happineſs,—nay to the exiſtence of civil ſociety, is the firſt maxim of ſound politics. Miniſters of the goſpel, from their office and character, by the authority they own, and the ſtandards they teach, are required to check, with all their might, a propoſal ſo deſtructive of the very ends of their miſſion: and to this, ſhould any be backward, (we will not ſay averſe,) Charity could ſcarce think them the ſervants of CHRIST. But of all ſuch, better things I hope; for, ſhould the ſcheme go on, I truſt *the Reverend* PRESBYTERY *of Edinburgh* (the guardians of this city's morals) will not be wanting to join their public to their private intereſts againſt it.

On this head I have only to add, That the *accompliſhment* of the intended deſign will not give a very favourable notion of the ſtate of religion amongſt us, when it is told, That although the plan for building a commodious Chapel in communion with the eſtabliſhment (ſo much wanted both by rich and poor, who cannot be provided with ſeats in the churches of the pariſh,) was obliged to be dropt thro' the diſinclination of individuals to advance the neceſſary expence; and that although the moſt humane inſtitution of ſome place of worſhip for the uſe of many thouſands who do not underſtand the ſervice in the mother tongue, is likely to terminate only in a *ſcheme*, becauſe of the general inattention

to

to their pitiable caſe; YET that the erection of a *Play-houſe* was projected, carried on, and brought into execution, without the ſmalleſt difficulty, and in the briſkeſt manner. —Had the magiſtrates agreed to inſert the application as a clauſe in their bill of extenſion, I muſt have ſaid 'twas *ominous* indeed, that a *temple of pleaſure* ſhould be the beginning, and, in a ſort, the dedication of our *New Town*.

II. As knowledge and virtue have been always found to go hand in hand, and as every ſtep from the path of duty, carries us equally away from that of improvement; when we ſpeak of the eſtabliſhment of a Licenſed Theatre, in reſpect of its effects on the intereſts of *learning*, we reſt on the foregoing reaſonings as a foundation, and proceed to remark ſome conſequences that are *peculiar* to this head. We might here argue, not only from obſervations already made, but from that unalterable connection between *the good*, and *the agreeable*, ſo ſtrongly eſtabliſhed, that (as a certain author ſays) "He who loſes his ſenſe of *virtue*, will ſoon find it follow-"ed by the loſs of all ſenſe of *beauty*."—When the baſis then is ſhaked, the ſuperſtructure falls; and true ſcience was never yet known to be reared on the abſence of principle. This is not all, however; ſeparate conſiderations, equally ſtrong, demand our attention.

EDINBURGH is the ſeat of an Univerſity. From the rank this univerſity holds, and the character ſhe has gained, near to 500 ſtudents, it is computed, annually reſort here for their education,—all of them young men—their principles generally unformed, and naturally liable to be led aſtray by temptation. Now, that a temptation ſo inviting, and (with youth) ſo irreſiſtible, ſhould be thrown in their way by thoſe who are bound to care for their advancement in piety as well as in knowledge, (how much ſoe'er contrary practice has eclipſed the ſenſe of obligation) is no leſs *unfriendly*, than it is *impolitic*. *Unfriendly*, to thoſe who, not having yet attained the judgment to controul themſelves, may, in future times, curſe this as the cauſe of a habit of idleneſs, and a diſſipated ſpirit that has embittered their life. *Impolitic*, for they are not aware that with the active hand which promotes this Theatre, they pull down

down the very fabric their public teachings would erect; I mean that of ſcience. The Play-houſe, in my opinion, is as much an enemy to the advancement of youth in learning, as it is to their growth in virtue. It is an amuſement not only diametrically oppoſite to the courſe of their ſtudies, but it encourages ſo much diſpoſitions the very reverſe,—an inclination to indolence,—an inſatiable thirſt after pleaſure,—a miſpence of time,—and an inſuperable averſion to ſober thinking, bliſsful ſolitude, and uſeful reading, that by degrees it extinguiſhes in the breaſts of its deluded votaries every deſire of improvement, and enervates every effort of the ſoul to obtain it.

The moſt ſtriking evidence, however, of the tendency of Dramatic Exhibitions to corrupt the manners, and impede the ſtudies of youth, is a declaration of the Great Aſſembly of the nation as to this point. I was told there exiſted ſomewhere a ſtatute forbidding all players, *&c.* to enter the precincts of *any* univerſity: but this I am not apt to believe; for I can neither think men of ſenſe would forward a meaſure in oppoſition to a law ſo expreſs, that's unrepealed, nor could I diſcover ſuch prohibition in the records of parliament. Be this, however, as it will, 'tis of no great moment; for I have now before me what fully anſwers my purpoſe, and is an indication almoſt equally ſtrong, of the ſentiments of the Britiſh legiſlature. By the 10 Geo. II. Cap. 19. " For our great-love and favour towards the two " univerſities of *Oxford* and *Cambridge*,—for our great zeal " and care for the maintenance of *good and godly literature*, " and *the virtuous education of youth* within the ſame;—" and for the better *increaſe of learning*, and the further " *ſuppreſſing of vice*," It is enacted, " That all perſons " whatſoever, who ſhall, for gain, in any play-houſe, booth, " or otherwiſe, exhibit any ſtage play, interlude, ſhew, " opera, or other Theatrical or Dramatic performance, or " act any part, or aſſiſt therein, within the precincts of ei-" ther of the ſaid univerſities, or within *five miles* of the " city of *Oxford*, or town of *Cambridge*, ſhall be deemed " *rogues and vagabonds*; and that it ſhall and may be law-" ful to and for the chancellor of either of the ſaid univer-" ſities, or the vice chancellor thereof, or his deputy, re-

" ſpectively,

" ſpectively *to commit* any ſuch perſon *to any houſe of cor-*
" *rection* within, or *to the common gaol* of the counties of
" *Oxford* and *Cambridge* reſpectively, *there to be kept to*
" *hard labour*, and *there to remain without bail or main-*
" *prize*, for the ſpace of one month; any licence of the
" chancellor, maſters and ſcholars, or any thing to the
" contrary notwithſtanding." The reaſons for this ſtatute are conceived in terms ſo concluſive with regard to *every* ſeminary, that to me it appears nearly the ſame as if there had been a general ſtatute, prohibiting plays to be within five miles of *any* univerſity. That there was not, is owing, I ſuppoſe, to its never having been applied for by the others, from the little probability of ſuch an erection's taking place in *Aberdeen* or *St Andrews*, and till of late, in *Glaſgow* or *Edinburgh*.—The Iriſh parliament regulates in the caſe of *Dublin*.

I cannot conclude *this* part of my letter, without one remark which the ſubject ſuggeſts. How much more had it been for the honour of the univerſity of *Edinburgh*, and how much more becoming the character of thoſe belonging to it, who aid this cauſe, if the zeal they diſcover on the unworthy occaſion had been transferred to the forwarding a propoſal once made in the news papers, of raiſing a handſome edifice to ſerve as a college, in place of the preſent paltry buildings which diſgrace our town? And I will venture to ſubjoin, that if it had, we might ere now have got an ornament to the city, and a houſe worthy of learning.

III. That induſtry is the ſoul of *trade*, and that the foundation of induſtry muſt be laid in ſobriety, (ſobriety taken in the juſt, extended ſenſe, ſo happily explained, both as to principle and practice, by the late learned Dr *Mayhew* of *Boſton*, in his ſenſible *Sermons to young* MEN) are axioms that were never yet diſputed. But to ſobriety the ſtage has proved the moſt formidable enemy; how then can it be called the friend of *commerce?* Indeed if we think for a ſecond, we ſhall find, that beſides undermining its ſupports, diligence and virtue, it even boldly attempts the demolition of the fabric. To this end, let us ſurvey the character of that part of an audience which is compoſed of perſons in commercial life. They are either ſuch as command

mand, or thoſe who obey. Under the firſt claſs, do we ſee the ſober citizen, reſpectable in his manners, and in ſociety beloved, who attends to buſineſs, or who is entruſted with the diſcharge of a public office in his community? Is it not rather the ſmarts, and flimſy fellows, who viſit their ſhop as ſeldom as they can, but commit the management to ſome duller genius,—to ſome more poring ſpirit, and who are far more concerned to ſhine in the dance, or gallant with the fair, than to apply to trade, or look to their affairs. Of *maſters*, theſe are they who generally fill the pit; of their *ſervants*, whether apprentice or clerk, bound or free, what a *groupe* do they make? There we find not the laborious and faithful, the honeſt and true!—the blood and the buck, the libertine and debauchee, the careleſs and idle, fill the ſcene. I can aſſure my readers, that there are at preſent many examples of the Stage's fatal effects on the commercial claſs of the inhabitants of *Edinburgh*. I have known young men who came here from the country to learn a profeſſion, attentive at firſt, and obedient to their maſters' commands, induſtrious in his ſervice, and concerned for his welfare, but by an attendance on the Theatre have had their head ſo turned, and their mind ſo engroſſed by acting, by plays, and by pleaſure, that before twelve months were expired, they would not have been known for the ſame: thoughtleſs and giddy, they grew impatient of their maſter's controul, neglectful of buſineſs, and regardleſs of his intereſts. Nay ſome, I have been told, uſed to forget their fidelity, and borrow from the till, when they could not gain it by other means, (at billiards, or at cards) the price of a ticket, if an order was not to be obtained. Truly it is a juſt ſaying; *Nemo repente fuit turpiſſimus*; but it is an adage no leſs ſage;

"Vice needs but a beginning to grow great."

For the ſake of commerce then, and in pity to many of her ſons, theſe things, I hope, will be taken into the conſideration of ſuch as are deſirous that ſhe ſhould proſper, and that they ſhould flouriſh. And for theſe and other reaſons, I think it is particularly incumbent on *the ſeveral Corporations* and *the Merchant Company* of this place, who have always diſtinguiſhed themſelves as the beſt friends of

the City, and the friends of truth, zealouſly *to remonſtrate* againſt the Propoſed Erection, that muſt ſo deeply touch them in their neareſt intereſts.

As a confirmation of all I have ſaid, I muſt beg leave to recommend to the peruſal of the public, a well wrote paper in the 5th volume of *the Gentleman's Magazine*, p. 206. where it is moſt clearly demonſtrated, that to the Theatre we abſolutely owe the ruin of *Athens*, and all the calamities which in conſequence thereof befel that flouriſhing ſtate:—a paper, which, had it not been too long, would have deſervedly made part of this letter. From the fate of others, let *us* learn!

And having now finiſhed our *Conſiderations* on the influence of a Licenſed Theatre in Edinburgh to the reſpective intereſts of *religion*, *learning* and *commerce*, there only remains to conſider alſo the reaſons aſſigned for ſuch a propoſal;—to ſhow their weakneſs;—and ſum up the whole.

We ſhall with all brevity purſue here the ſame method that was obſerved before; not entering upon any examination of the *general* arguments pled in behalf of the Stage; but confining ourſelves ſolely to the reaſons that are urged in defence of a licenſed Theatre in *Edinburgh*, and which apply only to the caſe in hand.

The *moral tendency* of Dramatic repreſentation then, out of the queſtion, we are *firſt* aſſailed by the advantages to be reaped by all ranks, and eſpecially by youth, of acquiring from this Theatre the proper pronunciation of Engliſh, and having before them the fineſt models for public ſpeaking. In this reaſon there is much ſpecioufneſs undoubtedly; for, I believe, it is the moſt ſolid that can be advanced on the ſubject: yet, after all, 'tis very theoretical. For I am not only diſpoſed to doubt whether this Theatre will really be a ſtandard of proper pronunciation, and graceful ſpeaking, but am much afraid, even allowing that it were, the Stage is not the place, nor means of acquiring theſe; at leaſt, I am certain, it is a mean not often adviſed by oratory teachers, or rhetorical writers. In pronunciation and action, the moſt celebrated of our preſent performers, both in *London* and *Dublin*, have ſomething peculiar to each, (as every actor has), improper to be copied, and a ſure proof

that

that even *there* is not the perfect ſtandard, elſe why ſuch variety? If this is the caſe with our *beſt* players, what will it not be among thoſe of a ſecond, third, or fourth rate character, from ſome one of which claſſes the *Edinburgh* company muſt always be made up? It may, perhaps, be objected, that in ſuch caſe diſcernment will chuſe the good, and leave what's amiſs; but the common proverb I would bring to mind, which ſays, "Imitators are ever more expert in taking off the blemiſhes, than in attaining the excellence of their originals;" and which is poſſibly the foundation of that moſt odious epithet applied to a ſpeaker, "He has a *theatrical manner*." Such as model themſelves by the Stage have uniformly been found *to act* rather than to ſpeak; and are conſequently heard with diſguſt. On the head of delivery and action, read *Cicero* and *Quinctilian*; but, above all, ſtudy nature, and ſhe will teach you better than a thouſand players: And as to pronunciation (which I greatly fear can never be perfectly pure, till it is more generally ſtudied in this country) it is with pleaſure I can ſay, we ſhall now very ſoon have a ſtandard, more permanent, and a method of acquiring it more eaſy and practical than any hitherto deviſed, in the Dictionary of a gentleman, to whoſe merit *Britain* has bore teſtimony, and whoſe name will ever be conjoined with refinement of language, and propriety in ſpeech.

Granting, however, ſome little improvement in this branch may be reaped from the Stage, (who expect *much* will be miſerably diſappointed), we go on to conſider another argument of more importance;—an argument which has been employed in converſation as a weapon to combat every part of our capital reaſonings;—namely, ſuch (fancied) regulations to which the new Theatre ſhall be ſubjected, and ſuch reſtrictions under which 'tis to be laid, that even to the moſt rigidly virtuous all ground will be removed of exception. This *intention*, I have no doubt, is ſincere, and that the ſchemers believe they can carry it through; but if they will credit me, I aſſure them it is altogether impoſſible. Such improvements of the Stage ever were, and ever will be impracticable. They can neither be expected from audience, actors, nor managers.—The plays, (ſays an eminent author) "corrupt

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the audience, and the audience in their turn have vitiated the plays." A company like that I formerly deſcribed to be in our pits, would reſent as the higheſt inſult, perhaps puniſh as the greateſt crime, all your improvements. The entertainment muſt be ſuited to *their* taſte, and till the virtuous principle has firmer hold of mankind, I will venture to aſſert, that a Theatre regulated according to virtue, ſhall be as thinly attended as the church; and tragedy or comedy modelled to this pitch, as little reliſhed as a prayer or ſermon. Now, beſides the conſideration of there not being ſuch a ſtock of plays in the Engliſh language as are entirely unexceptionable, and will ſerve a Theatre for a ſeaſon, it muſt alſo be attended to, that of thoſe plays it is in effect the frequenters of a playhouſe who determine what ſhall be acted; for the choice of the manager is always directed by the ſucceſs of performances, and the probability of their bringing what is termed a *good*, that is to ſay, a *full houſe*; and few managers will be found inclined to ſacrifice intereſt to virtue.—But again, ſuppoſing it otherwiſe, in whom would you veſt the power of judging as to the proper plays, and who would be the perſons to take this trouble? I wiſh *they themſelves* may be perfectly virtuous; and from ſuch as are not, what could we hope for?—Nay, if I go farther, and ſuppoſe this ſpirit of reformation to catch Dramatic *authors*, whoſe pieces, in conſequence thereof, would be executed on a new and better plan, yet from the principles hinted at above, I am certain ſuch writers would become moſt unpopular, and their productions would be ſpeedily buried under the great maſs of prior exceptionable performances.——The reformation of *players* would be indeed miraculous: for, as in another place we obſerved, their very profeſſion leads them to corruption, and an unfailing experience has proved it to be true. So that neither of actors, nor of audience, authors, performances, nor managers, is amendment, however much wiſhed, to be ſpeedily accompliſhed. The Stage would ſeem, in its nature, almoſt incapable of virtuous improvement. Regulations as ſtrict as thoſe deſigned in the preſent caſe, have been a conſtant argument in favour of every Theatrical erection;—of their execution, every man will judge.

But

But the impracticability of reformation I advance not on ſpeculation merely: the Annals of the Drama furniſh me with a memorable proof and example. The celebrated Mr SHERIDAN, late deputy maſter of the revels in *Ireland*, and manager of the Theatre-royal in *Smock alley, Dublin*, "Having "been ſome time on the Stage, looking with deteſtation on "the various corruptions and abuſes which, through a long "train of miſmanagement, had rendered it a public nuiſance, and the peſt of the town, took the reſolution to "attempt a total reformation; to give it a new conſtitution; to eſtabliſh order and decency, and, if poſſible, "place it on a better and more durable foundation than "any Theatre in *Europe* could boaſt. He foreſaw innumerable difficulties in the way; but as he was certain that "the accompliſhment of his point would be productive of "the higheſt benefits to that city in particular, and to the "kingdom in general, he determined at all hazards to undertake it. In the proſecution of the deſign, therefore, "no danger deterred him, no labour diſcouraged him, no "hazard ſtartled him, no expence ſtopped him." In purſuit of the patriotic ſcheme, he laboured for eight years with the utmoſt aſſiduity. His ſucceſs, though ſlow, was gradual; and about 1754, as to many things, he had well nigh compleated his plan. "The fabric, he thought," and has ſaid, "was built on a rock, and the Attic ſtory ſeemed only to be wanting." But—hear the reward of his toil—know the end of his improvements—"In one night "the labour of years was undone; and in one night all his "hopes were blaſted." A combination of the foes of virtue and decency againſt him was formed; the oppoſition was powerful and numerous; it increaſed through time, and former diſappointments made men more keen. They waited a favourable opportunity to execute vengeance; and on *Saturday, March* 2d 1754, they found it. The houſe was pulled down; its furniture either burnt, or broke, or carried off; the manager outrageouſly deprived of his property, and openly defamed in his character;—in danger of his life;—forced to abſcond,—and even leave, for a while, that ungrateful city he had ſo long and ſo faithfully ſerved. There terminated all his projects; and this was the iſſue of a

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ſcheme undertaken at the expence of his fortune; proſecuted at the hazard of his reputation; and attended with the loſs of his health.—Let this be a warning to future Stage-reformers.

There is but one other argument in defence of the eſtabliſhment propoſed that merits a reply. If a licenſed play-houſe, under proper regulation (it is ſaid) ſhall not be obtained, we will have what's much worſe, an unlicenſed one, where the law being evaded, our ſecurity againſt abuſe can be much leſs: and as we muſt have a houſe, is it not better to have a good, than a bad one?—I am partly grieved and partly aſhamed at this defence. That there *ought* to be any houſe, I deny; for to prove that we ſhould have none, has been the main intent of this letter. And that if there is not a good, there will be a bad houſe, if not a licenſed, there will be an unlicenſed one, is as frivolous a reaſon as I well can conceive. It is in the power of any ſingle man, or body of men who will take the trouble, and who will dare to check not only immorality, but contempt of the laws of our country, to put an immediate ſtop to theſe illegal proceedings. As the violation is ſo open, that both in the newſpapers and play-bills The THEATRE has been marked in capitals, without any colouring of a *concert of muſic* or other evaſion, I am bold to affirm, that on bringing an action in the competent court, for ſo notorious a treſpaſs, and in which no other proof is needed than the production of one of theſe play-bills, the cauſe muſt be heard, the offenders puniſhed, and after-playing interdicted, if judges do their duty, and if expreſs ſtatutes can avail us.

In the caſe under review, there has been an argument ſtarted, allied to the general queſtion, and applicable on all ſuch occaſions, of which I muſt beg leave to take notice ere I conclude. The argument is this, If we allow not the amuſements of the Theatre, and ſhut up the Play-houſe, we ſhall force the youth of the city, who will have entertainment of one kind or another, to relaxations leſs innocent;—to taverns;—to gaming;—and perhaps to ſtews. Now the conſequence is falſe. Although we deprive them of the amuſements of the Theatre, becauſe we cannot think them proper, yet we deprive them not of *all* amuſements, far leſs

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do we *compel* them to purſuits more guilty. The conſequence is not only falſe, but the reaſoning is unſound: it looks like a toleration of things ſinful, as being leſs ſinful than others; and appears much the ſame as if we ſaid, the crime of theft may be excuſed, for it is not ſo atrocious as that of murder. But beſides, I imagine, if the gradations and progreſs of vice were delineated with care, we might trace back even the riſe of employments more infamous, to an attendance on the Stage; which if not the root of theſe evils, is, at leaſt, a powerful promoter of them.

This letter (ſpun to a length beyond our firſt intention,) ſhall be brought to a period by the few following Queries, that place in one view the force of ſome foregoing reaſonings,—that flow from the ſubject,—and are ſuited to the times.

Has knowledge, has induſtry, has virtue moſt flouriſhed or declined in this city, and in this iſland, ſince the Theatre became the univerſal amuſement,—ſince Dramatic Exhibitions began to engroſs the public attention?

Who are the perſons that uſually ſupport and attend the Stage? and what is their character?

Is the Stage an amuſement really proper for Chriſtians?

Was ever any one known to be reformed from vice by the Stage?—But have not thouſands aſcribed their firſt ſwervings from virtue to this cauſe?

Has not the Stage that bewitching charm we deſcribed in the preceding pages?

Is it not even upon this account extremely dangerous to youth?

How improper then in the ſeat of an Univerſity?

Has not the pernicious conſequence of a Theatre in a trading place been often felt, as well as proved?

Is true oratory ever to be learnt from the Stage?

Is Stage-reformation in the preſent age to be effected? And does not experience as well as reaſon tell, all ſuch attempts are vain?

Is this a time, when the poor cry for bread, and the toil of the labouring man can ſcarce yield a ſubſiſtence;—Is this a time, when proviſions are ſcarce, and uncommon dearth is in the land;—Is this a time for raiſing temples of

luxury

luxury and pleasure, that must tend, in the issue, to increase such disasters?

Would it not be more honourable, more Christian, more humane, more productive of satisfaction to ourselves, and advantage to society, if that influence which must be exerted, and that money which must be laid out towards erecting this Theatre, were transferred to the support of a most useful institution, (*The Charity Work-house*, in the city), so beneficial to many, which just now groans under a load of debt, and want of necessaries; and from which, if not speedily relieved, must sink under the burden?

Will those gentlemen who most vigorously promote this Play-house, be equally forward to support this charity? Nay, will not the one scheme retard and hurt the other?

In fine, is it not the duty—will it not be the honour—of all who wish well to the *religion*, the *learning*, and the *commerce* of *Edinburgh*,—and of all who are concerned for the character of a present and rising generation,—to join hand in hand for the preventing a scheme so fatal to the interests of this City, and so alarming in its effects on the morals of her Citizens?

BRITISH MUSEUM 15 63 JAN

THE END.

By the Stat. 10 Geo. 2. C. 28 It is Enacted "That no person shall be authorized by Virtue of any Letters patent from his Majesty his heirs, or Successors, or by the Licence of the Lord Chamberlain to represent or cause any entertainments of the Stage in any part of Great Britain, except Westminster, or in such places where his Majesty his heirs, or Successors shall in their royal persons reside, during such residence only."